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Director

**County of Los Angeles**  
**DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**  
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January 27, 2005

To: Supervisor Gloria Molina, Chair  
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Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky  
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From: David Sanders, Ph.D. *DS*  
Director

**JANUARY 27, 2004 BOARD AGENDA ITEM S-2: DCFS EDUCATION UNIT**

On January 27, 2004, your Board directed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS or the Department) to make quarterly reports on the creation, staffing and efforts of the Education Unit within the Department. This is the fourth quarterly report.

This has been a productive period where issues impacting the educational achievement of foster children have been addressed through multidisciplinary collaborations.

The Education Unit is working closely with the newly formed Education Coordinating Council (ECC) to address the educational issues identified in the Education Summit Report of 2004 and develop a blueprint to address the educational needs of children in the dependency and probation systems. The plan is to address these issues through the Council's leadership quarterly meetings and establish collaborative solutions. With the assistance of the contracted consultants, under the leadership of Sharon Watson, the ECC is committed to providing your Board with a blueprint for educational success for dependent and probation youth by December 31, 2005.

Efforts to maximize the number of youth receiving free tutoring through the Federal No Child Left Behind Act, have led DCFS and the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) to discussions about the communication barrier imposed by a strict interpretation of the federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA). Currently, LAUSD has agreed only to provide aggregate data to the Department. An individual court order or authorizing signature of the holder

of education rights is required to share any information related to specific foster children. This prevents the use of technology to match data and provide Children's Social Workers (CSW) with critical information with which to develop effective case plans. This is an issue that concerns many stakeholders, including the ECC, the Child Victims in Court (CMIC) Partnership, and others.

The Education Unit, in conjunction with the Department's regional offices, collected data to determine the number of youth currently enrolled in nonpublic schools (NPS) and to ensure that each youth's enrollment met legal requirements. Based on the data received, of the 2,050 youth residing in group homes<sup>1</sup>, only 518, or 25% are enrolled in NPS. Of those, the CSWs have the Individual Education Program (IEP) designating the youth to receive educational services in a NPS for all but 28 or 3%<sup>2</sup> of youth. The Education Unit has been providing follow-up with the group homes for those children without current IEPs on file. Each day additional IEPs arrive and are distributed to the CSWs.

County Counsel is currently reviewing a contract to formalize an agreement between the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) Foster Youth Services (FYS) and DCFS, in order to increase educational services to youth residing in group homes and to service additional group home sites. The FYS counselors will work with the youth, group home providers, and schools to increase school attendance, ensure youth are placed in appropriate educational environments consistent with the youth's needs, and increase the number of youth achieving high school graduation. Currently, the anticipated start date for these expanded services is March 2005.

In December 2004, a Request For Interest (RFI) was issued to identify prospective candidates for eight Independent Education Specialist positions that will work in the Service Planning Areas (SPAs) and address education issues for the children we serve. The goal is to have the Education Specialists' expertise assist the Children's Social Workers and caregivers in navigating school systems, addressing special education concerns, literacy issues and resources, as well as school readiness preparation for preschoolers. The Department is currently awaiting responses.

The Education Unit has joined Mentoring Partnership Los Angeles Youth, under the leadership of Children Uniting Nations, to create and support quality mentoring relationships for youth in foster care. The Education Unit is contributing to development of training materials for the mentor orientation.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on statistical information provided from County of Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services Child Welfare Service Fact Sheet dated August 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Effective January 1, 2005.

The Department has joined with the ABC Unified School District to collaborate on the Safe Schools/Healthy Students federal grant that was recently received by this Cerritos area school district. The result is an allocation to the Department to fund a half-time CSW who will work at the school site to conduct family assessments, and facilitate links with DCFS programs such as Family Preservation, child protection, and family reunification. The Department is in the process of identifying the CSW and setting a start date.

Continuing responsibilities of the Education Unit include representing the Department's educational commitments with Dependency Court, other county agencies, Children's Law Center, LACOE, LAUSD and other school districts. In addition, the Education Unit is an active participant with the Reading Is Fundamental Program, Operation Read, Early Start to Emancipation Program (ESTEP), the Enrichment Plus Award Program, locating tutoring resources, preparing training materials for the Department, and addressing individual children's educational needs through collaborative efforts.

The Department appreciates your Board's commitment and support to improve educational outcomes for foster children. We are committed to continuing efforts with government and private agencies that seek solutions to meet the safety and educational needs of every child. Unless otherwise directed, this will be the final quarterly report on the on the creation, staffing and efforts of the Education Unit within the Department.

If you have any questions, please call me or your staff may contact Helen Berberian of our Board Relations Office at (213) 351-5530.

DS:CS:  
GMS:gms

c: Chief Administrative Officer  
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors  
County Counsel